



WISH
Drop-In Centre Society

WISH Drop-In Centre Society Annual Report: 2013-2014



Tile by WISH Participant

WISH Drop-In Centre Society

2013-2014 Board of Directors

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Kate Gibson	<i>Executive Director</i>	Sarah Orr

About WISH Drop-In Centre Society

WISH Drop-In Centre Society (WISH) is a **registered charity** (#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.

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

Whether a woman needs help exploring options for lessening her reliance on the sex trade, or whether she just needs a hot meal and few hours off the street, she is welcome at WISH.

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**

An Overnight Haven...

It has been a year of change for WISH since we opened the Drop-In Centre's doors overnight in March 2013! Even though the Centre is not a shelter, there are women who come in to rest and recharge late at night, when they are most at risk of violence. At the Centre, women can always find a healthy meal or snack and friendly volunteers and staff who offer services without judgment.

We have been meeting many new participants since the Centre opened overnight, and the word about WISH has spread. Staff often see upwards of 120 women coming for dinner and over 80 women at breakfast. Last year, WISH served 30,530 dinners, 19,885 breakfasts and over 13,000 snacks!

Volunteers are the glue that hold the Centre together. They come from all over the Greater Vancouver Area and work alongside WISH staff to create a safe and welcoming environment.

One of the many benefits of having the Centre open overnight is that staff who work on the MAP Van - our overnight street outreach van - can refer women on the streets there at all hours of the night. Not having a safe, women-only, trans* friendly space to refer women to during the overnight hours was a significant challenge for MAP Van staff in the past.

Being able to reach out to so many more women in need of support has been truly rewarding. At times, the demand for donated clothing and toiletries has been staggering but our community has always responded generously to our many requests for donated items!

While we celebrate being able to provide essential services for many more hours, nothing will ever take away the regret that WISH was not able to provide these services in the years that so many women went missing and were murdered.

The WISH Office Has Moved!

Over the last year and a half WISH has been working with the City of Vancouver to secure funding to renovate the lower floor of the building that houses the WISH Drop-In Centre and to work with an architect to ensure the most efficient use of this space. In 2006, when City Council voted to have the WISH Drop-In Centre occupy the upper floor of the Vancouver Police Department's Garage, they also committed for us to have the downstairs area once the police moved their operations to a new facility. We are happy to report that the WISH offices have now relocated to **334 Alexander**, leaving behind the Pender Street offices that we occupied for the last 13 years.

The new space has room for all of us and an especially great room for the Aboriginal Health and Safety Project. **We thank the Central City Foundation for their generous contribution to this programming space and we are grateful to the City of Vancouver for once again supporting WISH to become increasingly stable and able to serve our community even more efficiently.**

Note from the Board Chair

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Roberta Robertson. I have been involved with WISH for many years, first as a volunteer at the Drop-In Centre and as a Board Member for the last four years. As a member of the Strathcona community I always wanted to be involved with an organization that offered support to the women I would see when I walked in my neighbourhood and travelled to and from work.

When I found WISH and got to know the programs, I knew I had found a good fit for my personal beliefs. I started by volunteering in the kitchen and in other areas wherever I was needed. I loved being part of a group of volunteers who were coming together for the greater good of women.

This was some years ago and when I reflect today on how it was at the beginning of my time here and how it is now, I am thrilled to be part of the ongoing change. I have always admired the WISH staff for how dedicated they are to helping women who face unspeakable violence and chaos in their lives. Their commitment and care, along with their experience and good decision making skills ensure that women are treated with dignity and respect in all areas of the organization.

It has always been through the generosity of many individuals, foundations, community groups, levels of government and businesses that WISH has been able to sustain a commitment to meeting the basic needs of women who engage in the street-based sex trade. I appreciate the trust that donors put in WISH to carry out this work and we have financial policies and procedures in place to protect donors' investments. We know that in this time of fiscal restraint on so many fronts that we are particularly fortunate to receive their support.

This past year, many sex workers celebrated the Supreme Court's decision to strike down three sexwork-related prohibitions and give parliament one year to draft new legislation. However, there is good reason to be concerned about the Government of Canada's pushback and the even more draconian laws that are being proposed under Bill C-36. WISH will always exist, regardless of the laws in place around sex work, but we remain concerned about how these proposed laws will affect women's safety. Furthermore, we are deeply troubled that women currently involved in the sex trade - who will be the most affected by this legislation - are not being consulted about their needs.

We intend, as always to keep working to ensure that women are informed of their rights and to provide ongoing safety and care. **I thank you for your support of the women who come to WISH and look forward to our future.**

Roberta Robertson - Board Chair

In Women's Words

"It's nice to know there is a **safe place** for me to come. A '**something good**' to look forward to!"

- WISH Aboriginal Program participant



Aboriginal Health & Safety Project Coordinator
Alexandria and Program Assistant Wanda

"It has impacted my life in the **best way ever**. I suffer from depression. Since working here my mood has been **nothing but positive!** I do my best not to let my anxiety and depression get the best of me. **My drug use has decreased a lot**".

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



WISH staff and volunteers at the
2014 Scotiabank Charity Challenge

"Thanks to the ladies who make my nights just a little easier to get through. **Without you, who knows what would happen to us.** Thank-you to all and keep up the great work. **Love & respect.**"

- MAP Van participant



WISH Board Member Siobhan McCormick, Executive
Director Kate Gibson and Board Chair Roberta Robertson

"Finally - *Community*...Thank-you!"

- Drop-In Centre Participant

WISH Program News 2013/2014

Aboriginal Health & Safety Project (AHSP)

- A core group of 8-10 Indigenous women with experience in survival sex work meet twice weekly at WISH to learn traditional arts and cultural practices including art, beadwork, drum making, singing & more!
- Creative Aboriginal evenings activities on Thursdays at the WISH Drop-In Centre are open to all.
- The AHSP Coordinator provides Indigenous and non-Indigenous women with individualized support around housing, family issues, trauma, advocacy etc. two nights a week at the WISH Drop-In Centre.



Read more about the AHSP here: <http://bit.ly/1euWN5O>

In 2013/2014, the AHSP was generously supported by The Anglican Fund for Healing and Reconciliation, RBC Foundation and individual donors!

Peer Volunteer Program

"It makes me feel like I am part of something. My kids are proud of me!" -PVP Participant

In 2013/2014 the Peer Volunteer Program (PVP) trained 6 women from the WISH community to assist WISH staff around the drop-in centre with cooking, managing donations and helping to create a supportive social environment for women. They do a fabulous job and are an integral part of the centre.

Thanks so much, PVP Participants!

Mobile Access Project (MAP) Van

March 15th, 2014 was the 10th anniversary of the MAP Van. The van has been out on the streets of Vancouver overnight, 7 nights a week, offering supplies, myriad referrals, coffee/snacks and a safe place to be for sex working women who have few options available in the middle of the night. We look forward to serving women for many more years to come!

A new, customized vehicle will be purchased in 2014 thanks to the MAC AIDS Fund and a private donor!



Read more about the MAP Van here: <http://bit.ly/1hGryEz>

Peer Safety Patrol

In 2013/2014, the Peer Safety Patrol (PSP) program supported 12 women from the WISH community in learning new skills, gaining mainstream job experience and earning extra income!

The PSP program is a supported-employment initiative that trains and employs women with current or past involvement in street-based sex work to provide security for the WISH Drop In Centre. You can read more about it at: <http://wish-vancouver.net/programs-and-services/peer-safety-patrol/>



In 2013/2014, the PSP was generously supported by: Individuals who donated to and participated in the Scotiabank Charity Challenge, Face the World Foundation, Vancity, Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, St. Andrews Wesley United Church, The Andrew Mahon Foundation, The Leon and Judah Blackmore Foundation and individual donors!

WISH Program News 2013/2014

Volunteers

WISH loves volunteers! In its formative years, volunteers built WISH and established it as an essential point of contact for women involved in street-based sex work.

Volunteers help WISH in so many ways, including:

- Preparing meals at the centre.
- Staffing the clothing and makeup rooms.
- Serving on the Board of Directors.
- Helping out in groups as part of corporate service days.
- Organizing third-party fundraising events.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer at WISH, please email wishvolunteers@shaw.ca.

Women Helping Women

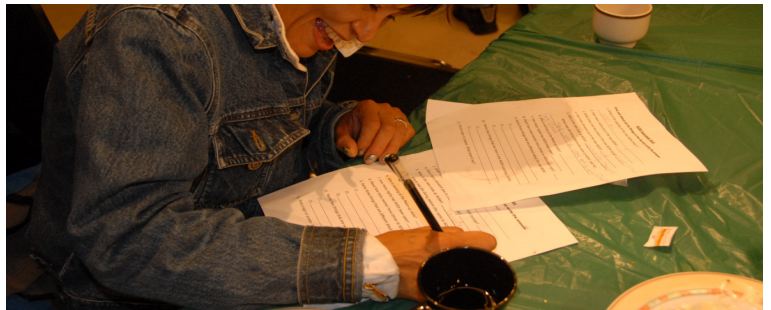
WISH participants' voices are always present in decision making. Women can get involved in several ways:

- **Board of Directors:** Three seats on the Board are reserved for WISH community members.
- **Women's Advisory Group (WAG):** Women meet once a month at the Centre to discuss issues and pass feedback to the WISH Board of Directors.
- **Emerging Voices (EV):** A group of WISH participants who plan fun, social events for their peers.
- **Change in our Backyard (CIOB):** *Funded by a grant from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation*, CIOB is an initiative that trains and employs sex-working women to do research and analyze data from 150 interviews regarding their safety in the community. The outcome of this work will be that participants will become advocates with housing providers and others who can help improve the safety of sex workers.

The WISH Drop-In Centre

A safe, non-judgmental space open from 6:00 p.m - noon seven days a week where women involved in the survival sex trade can access:

- **Hot, nutritious meals (30,530 dinners/19,885 breakfasts and 13,188 snacks served in 2013/2014!)**
- **An on-site clinic**
- **Clean clothing and personal care items**
- **Safe, clean showers and washrooms**
- **Aboriginal cultural programming**
- **Referrals to community organizations that provide specialized services (i.e. help finding housing, detox, treatment)**
- **Weekly visits from the VPD Sex Industry Liaison, who provides assistance to women as requested**
- **Individualized support**



On-Site WISH Learning Centre

- A partnership between WISH and **Capilano University** for the past 13 years.
- Average of **15 learners** per evening.
- Offers **literacy** programming as well as **learning and skills development activities** with a focus on communication and self-advocacy.
- Instructors from **Capilano University and WISH** provide **guidance and support** for women who wish to **pursue their GED and other opportunities for formal education** outside WISH.

"(WISH) opened my eyes to **living a sober life** with my son & now (I'm) **blessed with a beautiful little girl** not sure if anyone remembers me but WISH had a **huge impact** on my life thank u !!!" - Former WISH Participant



Tiles by WISH Participants

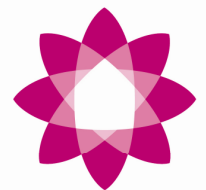
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