

WISH Drop-In
Centre Society

WISH NEWS
SPRING 2023

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Mapping the way forward



WISH staff and volunteers attend a Town Hall to discuss the findings of our Organizational Development Review.

As we transition out of our COVID emergency response, we are focusing efforts on strengthening our capacity and continue to improve the supports available to participants. As a result, we completed a full-scale Organizational Development Review, designed to evaluate our workplace culture, identify opportunities to improve our work and staff supports, and implement actionable changes to strengthen our service delivery.

The comprehensive process has allowed us to map out a healthy, impactful, and values-driven way forward. The process included focus groups with peers, staff members, volunteers, and WISH's Board, as well as the review of hundreds of documents.

The main areas of focus are:

- Governance, culture, and strategic leadership
- Organizational framework, processes, and infrastructure
- People – human resource management
- Services – program and service management
- Access and equity

This process helps us to better understand our current organizational state as well as make informed decisions to support efficiency, effectiveness, wellness, and achievement for participants, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders.



At WISH, we believe in stability through solidarity.

We're inviting you to stand with us as we go through this journey so that we can continue to improve the lives of participants and engage our employees in healthy transformational change that will benefit our entire community.

Congratulations to the first IHSP graduating cohort

Congratulations to the first graduating class from the revamped Indigenous Health and Safety Program! This January, five participants officially graduated from the 6-month program, making them the first graduating cohort since COVID began.

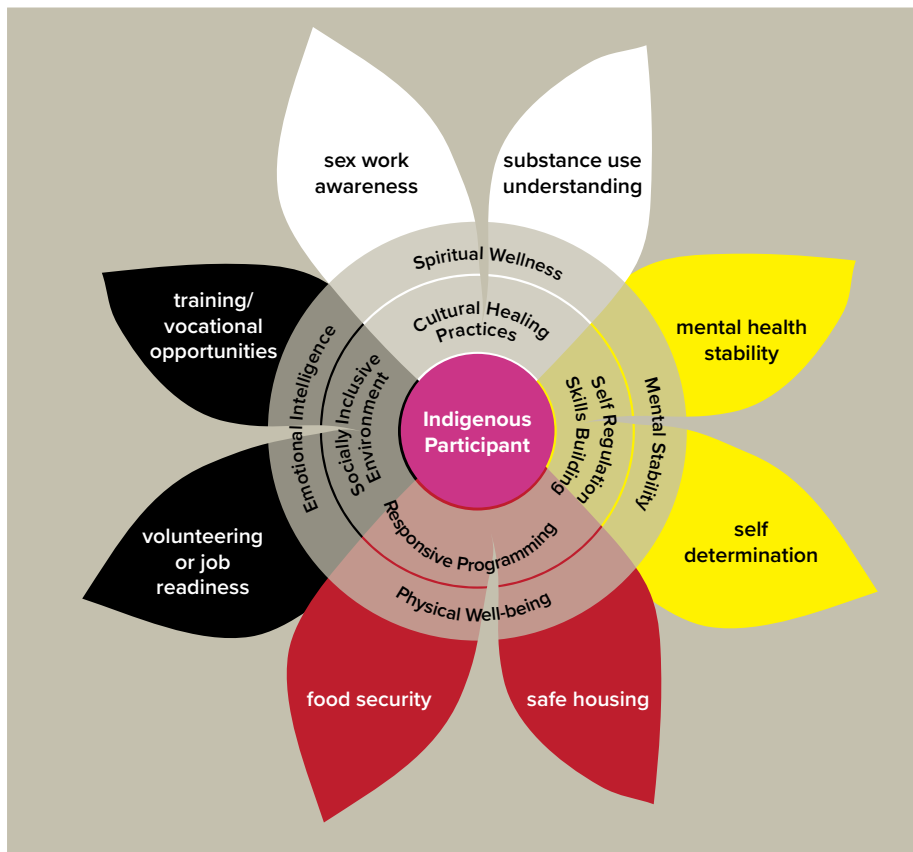
The program is designed to offer cultural healing centering participants' mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. With a trauma-informed focus, it also addresses the specific realities of survival sex work while affirming participants' inherent right to dignity and self-determination wherever they are in their journey.

"Healing doesn't have an end, there's always more to learn and more to heal from. When I started my journey with IHSP, everything fell into place for me. The program has been greatly helpful to my healing and a big part of my self awareness."

—IHSP Graduate

The cohort meets twice a week for 2.5 hours each day. Using the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, the program is divided into four modules: mental health stability, physical wellness, emotional intelligence, and spiritual wellness. Throughout the program, participants also make their own spiritual tools such as medicine pouches, drums, ribbon skirts and vests, cedar cuffs, and more.

Through reclamation of traditional healing, alongside culturally safe support and advocacy, the program addresses the impacts of daily colonial violence on the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health



IHSP is grounded in the understanding that culture is therapy.

"The program changed me... I have learned so much about myself. I am proud of myself. I am now able to talk and share more about myself. It is a great program!"

— IHSP Graduate

of Indigenous participants. It is a space to reclaim community-care, self-love, joy, creativity, and self-determination. IHSP provides participants with the cultural tools and Indigenous ways that will accompany participants outside of WISH and throughout their lives.

The inspiring graduates are now peer mentors for the new cohort and help co-facilitate activities such as Sex Worker Circle. We look forward to celebrating the achievements of the next cohort!

STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

WISH's first-ever Housing Support Worker

It's been almost one year since WISH's first-ever Housing Support Worker (HSW) position was created and Therese Barrozo joined our Inreach team.

The position provides vital one-to-one case management to participants who experience episodic and/or chronic homelessness and precarious housing. The HSW directly supports former and current street-based sex workers in securing and maintaining appropriate safe housing.

Within her first 6 months on the job, the HSW achieved some incredible milestones, including working with almost 80 participants, facilitating full-needs assessments and developing participant-centered plans for tenancy placements that include support requirements within the community.

The position has been key in helping participants overcome some of the challenges they face when attempting to navigate the extremely complicated housing sector.

"We had one participant who felt safer staying at the WISH Shelter than in their current housing because of the supports available to her here. That's why securing safe and stable housing for participants is so crucial."

– Therese Barrozo, Housing Support Worker



Therese Barrozo - WISH Housing Support Worker

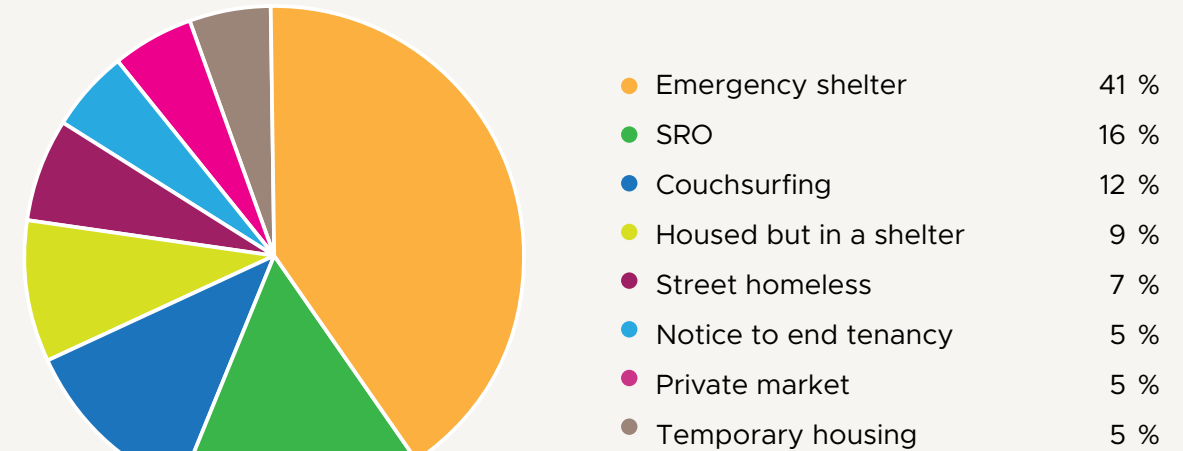
Out of the participants supported by the HSW:

- 55% did not have a phone where they could be reached by housing providers
- 66% did not have a birth certificate, required for subsidized housing placements
- 31% had a quality reference
- 9% were rejected for housing

Some of the buildings have eligibility requirements that can add to the barriers, and, suitable housing is extremely limited, more than half of the units available are single room and do not have a kitchen.

When WISH's first-of-its-kind emergency temporary shelter opened, a major service gap was identified

Housing situation of participants at the time of intake



when trying to place shelter residents with appropriate safe housing. The overwhelming demand for our emergency shelter continues to highlight the urgent need for appropriate, long-term housing. The need is more critical now than ever, which is why the HSW position is so crucial.

We continue to advocate for, and work towards, affordable housing.

"A year from now, we hope to celebrate that a significant number of street-based sex workers have secured safe, affordable, and appropriate longer-term housing."

– Mebrat Beyene, Executive Director



Our WISH shelter has been at capacity since opening its doors in October 2020. (Photo: Wendy D. Photography)

**More support.
With your help.**



**Will you help us spring
forward and reach our
goal of \$15,000?**



MAP Van day and night shifts saved

We're happy to report that WISH's Mobile Access Project Van will be able to continue to offer critical services to street-based sex workers thanks to support from Premier David Eby and the Province of BC.

Thanks to their support, the program has received a one-time grant that will allow us to maintain current operating levels for approximately two years. **This means that, for the first time in over a decade, the MAP Van won't be running with a deficit due to funding shortages.**

We are extremely relieved and grateful to see such a significant investment in the sustainability of this vital program. The MAP Van is the only outreach service of its kind in Vancouver and one of only two in the Lower Mainland.

We are also extremely happy that an interim replacement van has arrived thanks to the support of the City of Vancouver. Despite having secured funding from the Province of BC in 2022 for a new van, supply issues prevented us from being able to purchase a replacement. The interim vehicle will allow us to ease the pressure from our ageing van, which was forced to be off the road for 41 days and 39 nights last year due to frequent breakdowns.

The MAP van is on the road 12 hours a day, 365 days a year and sees an average of 190 participants each week. Staff offer food and drinks, harm reduction supplies, naloxone kits, hygiene supplies, and they collect reports of violent and predatory behaviour towards sex



The interim van will allow us to ease the workload of our ageing van.

workers known as Bad Date Reports. They also provide information and referral services, as well as peer support.

Losing either the daytime or the overnight shift of the MAP Van would not only disconnect street-based sex workers from necessary and often lifesaving services, but it would also significantly damage their trust in the reliability and accessibility of our services. Lack of funding should never be the reason we can't improve the safety of street-based sex workers.

We want to, once again, thank the Province of BC and the City of Vancouver for investing in the sustainability of such a critical program, and in the safety of street-based sex workers.

Ready, set, fundraise!

The Vancouver Half Marathon Charity Challenge race is back! Whether you're looking for a serious challenge or a fun activity for the whole family, there are many ways you can support WISH. You can sign up to run the 21K, walk the 5K, opt for a virtual course that you create, or make a pledge to support someone who is running to raise funds for WISH!

The Charity Challenge race is one of our largest fundraising events of the year. Unfortunately, due to COVID, we haven't been able to reach our fundraising goal these last few years. This year we are lacing up, training for the big day, and encouraging everyone to take part.

We hope you will join us on Sunday, June 25 for a spectacular day, raising money for a great cause! And if running is not your thing, no problem, you can always donate to support the WISH team that will be racing that day.



By Us For Us unique report released

A 100% sex worker-developed and sex worker-run research project has released a report on the needs and risks faced by sex workers in the Lower Mainland and Southern Vancouver Island. The By Us, For Us project surveyed 239 sex workers between April and August 2021 and held focus groups during December of that year.

Some major and clear themes emerged, including:

- Unique needs and risks faced by sex workers with intersecting oppressions
- Need for diverse harm-reporting and justice systems
- Risks of violence experienced by sex workers
- Need for robust government response to the overdose crisis
- Strong need for mental health supports

Of the sex workers surveyed:

45%

were Indigenous

29%

had dependents

35%

were not
safely housed

46%

had difficulties
paying for food

73%

were living
with disabilities

60%

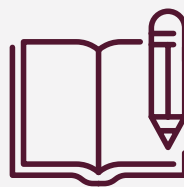
were worried about a
loved one overdosing

The findings confirm the truly striking and concerning realities of sex workers.

Visit our website to
read the [full report](#).



BC BDAR: Research and consultations completed!



The Consultation Phase of the BC Bad Date and Aggressor Reporting Project is almost done! The purpose of the consultations is to hear directly from sex workers across BC about their

experiences with various types of violence and bad date reporting, as well as their ideas for improving bad date reports and their opinions on key issues.

A Bad Date Reporting System is a sex worker-led response to report violent incidents or safety concerns to peers and/or outreach workers. These incidents and concerns are tracked in databases and distributed to sex workers to help keep each other safe. The three-year BC BDAR Project will create a first-of-its kind, province-wide bad date reporting system.

Once consultations are done, a report will be published to share the feedback from sex workers and will act as a roadmap for the development of the system. Sex workers will continue to be involved in every step, including research, design, development, and evaluation of the system.

Sex workers are compensated for their feedback and can contribute through different avenues including sharing circles, kitchen table talks, self-directed workbooks, and art consultations.

For more information, visit the BC BDAR website at bcbdar.org

